

INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE
(BLACK-WHITE)

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BACKGROUND OF INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

The introduction of slavery into the American continent made the control of marriage and the family of Negro slaves inevitable. The relations between a black and white and the maintenance of the super-inferior position became a vital concern to public officials, as the so-called "black codes" surely evidenced. Sex and marital relationships between the races were severely delineated by law and custom. Violation of the social sanctions was met with strong reprimand (however, these were unequal for blacks and whites), and sex transgressors in many instances were punished by mutilation or hanging.¹

The question of amalgamation of the races, within or without the law, was openly debated in the 1800's. Some of the antislavery groups supported the idea of freedom to intermarry; others opposed it. The argument of the antislavery group was that miscegenation was occurring outside the law because of slavery, with white men exploiting Negro women, and hence the abolition of slavery would stop such interbreeding. There was, they commonly asserted, little desire on the part of members of either race to intermarry. A century later at the heart of the desegregation debate in the 1960's, one again finds the issue of interracial sex relations. Only, now the question centered upon the individual's

¹B.I. Murstein, "Marriage Across Racial Lines in Indiana," Journal of Family Relations 29 (November 1973): 670-673.

right to marry across racial lines. The right was declared the law of the land in the Supreme Court decision of 1967.

²Ibid.

THE REALITY OF INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

In the United States, despite its freedom and individualism, marriages between persons of different faiths and interracial marriages have for the most part been resisted and condemned by families and the larger community. A number of factors have changed the picture in the United States in recent years and have brought together black and white young people. These are:

1. The struggle for civil rights has broken down many of the barriers which in the past kept the races separate.
2. More and more black people have migrated to the North and to the cities.
3. More and more young people are in contact with one another across racial lines in schools and colleges, jobs, public places, integrated housing, and recreational and cultural activities.
4. The family has lost some of its control and influence on the young.

A social climate of increasing acceptance of interracial marriage by whites has evolved. In 1965, a Gallup Poll indicated that 48 percent--almost half of those questioned--approved of legal prohibition of marriage between whites and blacks.³ By 1970, that number had fallen to 35 percent, and 56 percent disapproved of laws prohibiting interracial marriage.⁴

³Irving R. Stuart and Lawrence E. Abt, Interracial Marriage (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), p. 11.

⁴Ibid.

INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE
ON PERSONAL AND
FAMILY LEVELS

A fair-sized section of the parent population feels that their own standards and beliefs are so threatened that they will utterly reject a son or daughter who enters into an interracial marriage. Other parents may not be racist, but may have a genuine concern for what they believe to be the best interests of a son or daughter. Most parents are concerned that the young people know the realities they will have to deal with and face. In many cases mixed couples have had to live in secret and in isolation without normal social contacts in communities away from their families. Very often they have decided not to have children because they feared the impact of social ostracism and rejection for their young. Other parents are concerned less about the young couple, than about the effect the marriage will have on their own relationships and status with their relatives and neighbors.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

Professional marriage counselors stress that people sometimes marry without really knowing each other; without seeing the real person in the other one. They may marry because of a particular need at a particular time in their lives. Some people enter an interracial marriage because they are rebelling against parents and against society. They may marry out of compassion or out of guilt for what society has done to the member of the other racial group.⁵ People may use one another without even being aware of what they are doing. A neurotic person chooses a partner who will sustain his neuroticism. A person may marry outside his group and take refuge in a person with whom he can be rejected by society, thus feeding his need to withdraw from the realities of life.⁶ Other men or women entering interracial marriage do so because they may need the sense of security that they believe marriage will bring. They may be materialistic enough to see an opportunity for comfort and status which otherwise would not be open to them.

⁵Ibid., p. 13.

⁶Ibid., p. 14.

POTENTIAL ROLE CONFLICTS IN
BLACK-WHITE MARRIAGES

Marriage involves acting new roles--those of husband, wife, and usually, parent. Conflicts can arise from the feeling or belief that marital roles in the black community are different from those in the white community. The following assumptions are made on the basis of recent literature on the black community that makes much of the large number of black families headed by women.

1. Black families have been disorganized ever since the days of slavery because marriage was prohibited among slaves or arbitrarily broken

2. Black men cannot get jobs paying enough to support the family and enable them to assume responsibility as head of the family

3. The inability of the black man to provide for his family and his inability to protect the black woman from unwelcome sexual advances from the white man, has harmed the black man's concept of his own masculinity

Even if all these assumptions and their consequences were true, only 28 percent of black families are female headed.⁷

The idea that the black man has been subordinate and

⁷U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics, Selected Characteristics of Persons and Families, Series P-20, No. 204 (July 13, 1970), p. 2.

should now try to be dominant even in his marital roles is widely held and practiced. Among black militants male dominance is acted out with great clarity.⁸ Women walk behind the men and defer to them conspicuously.

On the other hand, among the white middle class, men and women are assuming more equalitarian roles. Among college-educated whites, men are not only willing for their wives to work, but glad to have someone share the responsibility of earning the living. In return, young white men are willing to share household and child-rearing tasks as well as deciding how money should be spent.⁹ The assumption of a male dominance role by blacks and more equalitarian roles by white males could be a real source of potential role conflict within Black-White marriage, barring all other possibilities of role conflict.

⁸Kermit Mehlinger, "That Black Man White Woman Thing," Ebony, January 1973, p. 131.

⁹William F. Kenkel, "Influence Differentiation in Family Decision Making," Family Roles and Interaction (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), p. 63.

CHILDREN OF INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES

The uncertainty about where and how one will live, being neither White nor Black is about as great as any problem a human being is likely to face. Most States in the Union insist that a person with one drop of Negro blood is a Negro. Nor does it matter that one of the parents may be either White or a non-Negro. The child is officially declared to be a Negro, no matter what his inclinations or interests with respect to family, friends, or even culture may be. That such persons may be faced with overwhelmingly serious problems, not easily resolved, should be obvious.¹⁰ That such persons, aware of their parentage, are part white does not solve the problem for our society generally declares that they are also part Negro. The racial hybrid is thus faced with serious problems. Shall such a person try to "pass" as a white person? Is his skin color such that he could, assuming he would wish to do so? Should he rather identify with the Negro group and forget about his white ancestry? Whatever the decision, it is not easily made and the problems likely to ensue for the product of an interracial marriage are many. There are major problems for the individual, involving personal insecurity and other psychological and

¹⁰Albert I. Gordon, Intermarriage (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 263.

emotional problems as well.¹¹ Interracial families and their children have to come to grips with this identity crisis. Each child must cope with identity problems and with adjustment problems thrust on him by social contradictions.¹² Such a child is in conflict with parents, with society, and with himself. How well he is able to resolve this struggle depends upon his parent's awareness of the problems, and how well they can integrate this conflict for the child. The racial problem is not a causal factor related to any specific clinical maladjustment; but rather, a stress factor that affects general problems of living and creates additional pressures on the children and their families. A greater strength is required of a bi-racial family in order to achieve the same level of adjustment than is required of an uni-racial family. Children who manifest emotional disturbances belong to families in which parents unwittingly involve them in their own conflicts.¹³ Healthy families that manage to work out their problems should also be studied, since they accomplish the seemingly impossible--the integration of conflicting attitudes.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²John D. Skiegal, "The Resolution of Role Conflict Within the Family," Psychiatry 20 (1957): 1-16.

¹³Ibid., p. 13.

TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY - INTERRACIALLY

The race question goes far deeper than pigmentation.

Racial differences in matters like character and ability, are not inborn but acquired. This fact does not make them any less real. Members of minority groups are usually treated differently than those of the majority groups. When you are treated differently you will inevitably be different. That such inequality is unfair does not change the very real fact of difference.

Such differences in treatment may make one better, or it may make one worse. It will certainly make one different in ways that can affect the success of the marriage.¹⁴

Social attitudes, good or bad, will affect a marriage.¹⁵ People of different races do fall in love with each other. There is nothing unusual or alarming about this. It could happen to anyone. Should such couples marry? It is not necessary to remind any American that the pressures and difficulties such a marriage engenders will be tremendous. The couple and their children usually suffer abuse and discrimination that the member of the majority group would otherwise never be subjected to. Pointing out these problems does not imply that members of other races are

¹⁴Sylvanus M. Duvall, Before You Marry (New York: Association Press, 1959), p. 184.

¹⁵Ibid.

inferior or unworthy. It does mean that love or personal worth cannot be the sole basis for sound marital selection, particularly in such cases. The basic question is, "Why enter into a relationship that will seriously harm one of the couple without benefiting the other?" At present, racial intermarriage can be disastrously serious in the United States.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., p. 185.

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